



The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

A recent article in a Sunday newspaper was introduced as heralding "a new era in straight thinking and hard hitting in this nation's diplomacy." It certainly raised issues about which the straightest thinking is necessary. But the thinking in the article was exceedingly crooked. It reeked with the smell of the crooked cross. Here is a sample :—

"This world in which we live is not a milk and bun shop, a potential Eldorado or a glorified kindergarten. What, then, is it? It is a thieves' den in which the violent survive and the submissive succumb. In it two things predominate—you grab or you are grabbed. Every kingdom, republic or empire has been built out of loot, and every kingdom, republic and empire is ultimately lost to a looter. Might may not be right, yet might and not right has made and unmade each dominant power. That I can knock you down and that you can knock me down is the supreme fact in history. 'Grab or be grabbed.' That is what this war is all about. And whatever your politics or morals may be, I anyhow prefer to be a grabber than a grabbee. Grab, grabbing, grabbed—in these three words are condensed 90 per cent of world history, and in war the remaining 10 per cent doesn't count."

Who says that? Not Hitler or Mussolini, though it is the marrow of their philosophy, and they have said it many times in other words. The quotation is from an article by General J. F. C. Fuller in the *Sunday Pictorial*, which is editorially described as "a challenge that should be read by every British man and woman."

The writer goes on to ask how our empire was collected and how it is going to be held. The answer is that "it was collected by probably fewer than a hundred determined men, such as Drake, Raleigh, Clive, Warren Hastings, Raffles and Rhodes." The conclusion is that what we have to search for to-day is *grabbers*—"men who have the wits and guts to hold our empire as they had the wits and guts to wrench it bit by bit from the flanks of other nations and peoples; men who punch and not men who talk—who punch with their brains as well as with their fists."

It is detestable stuff, some of you may say, but why take up time with it in the Christian News-Letter? The readers of the News-Letter do not require to be persuaded of its pernicious character. What more need be said? To my mind a great deal.

A SHIFT OF ATTITUDE

I do not think that we can take too seriously the fact that the baleful doctrine which the nation is expending its life-blood to resist should unashamedly rear its ugly head upon our own soil. I still remember the shock with which many years ago I read in a book of Oswald Spengler's the blunt assertion that man is essentially a beast of prey: here in an English newspaper, under the authority of a distinguished soldier, we find the same inhuman and devilish doctrine ardently commended to the British public.

It would be a mistake to regard the article as the mere aberration of an individual. The editorial commendation of it is symptomatic of a shift of attitude that is alarming in its possibilities. A friend who has a wide range of contacts tells me that there are many

young men in his acquaintance who would agree with General Fuller. A section of our people is becoming Nazi in thought. Can there be a deeper, inner betrayal of our cause ?

These doctrines are promulgated in a newspaper with a wide circulation. One cannot tell into what unformed and half-educated minds they may sink and take root. Among these there may be some who possess qualities of will-power, native resourcefulness and reckless daring which in war or in turbulent times can carry them, like the Nazi and Italian gangsters, to positions of the highest influence and power. Large numbers of our population are without faith or settled convictions of any kind ; many of them, through no fault of their own, have had the most meagre education. Reared in memories of the last war, and engrossed for three years day and night in this, the younger part of the population have much in their experience that supports the view that force is the only thing that matters. There exists consequently a large mass which is in a condition to be swept away by specious doctrines which are forcibly and skilfully presented to them. The article will serve one good purpose if it shows us the precipice towards which we may be sliding.

TO YOUR TENTS, O ISRAEL

What can be done to prevent the contagion of this noxious doctrine ? All the agencies of education—the Churches, the universities, the schools, the B.B.C., those concerned with education in the forces—ought to seize every opportunity to expose its falsity and to expound a truer conception of man and society. Nazism triumphed in Germany because the elements which could have defeated it failed to take it seriously and to adopt in time the measures to resist it. The values for which we are fighting, the hopes which hundreds of millions of plain men and women throughout the world have for the future, the whole Christian understanding of man are called in question, and the challenge has to be met with the utmost energy.

It is unhappily true that history is in large measure a record of war, conquest, robbery and exploitation, and that all these have played their part in the growth of the British Empire, as of every empire that ever existed. But it is equally true that the essence of civilization in contrast with barbarism consists in man's unending effort to establish law and justice, harmony and peace. The history of the British Empire, stained as it is by crimes, is at the same time the history of the progressive extension of liberty under the common law, of representative and responsible government, and of the conception of government as a trust on behalf of those over whom it is exercised. It contains not only the name of Warren Hastings but that of Edmund Burke who impeached him, and who devoted fourteen laborious years to laying the foundations of a just and responsible public opinion about India. "Fraud, injustice, oppression, speculation, engendered in India," he maintained, "are crimes of the same blood, family and cast with those that are born and bred in England." If Drake and Raleigh, in common with their contemporaries in all the leading European nations, engaged in the slave-trade, William Wilberforce devoted his life and fortune to its abolition. Let us recognize as realistically as we will the part which power, might, force play in human affairs : what the world has known for 2,000 years as civilization consists in bringing them under the restraining and controlling influence of right and law.

The new era which the article is said to herald is, in fact, a reversion to barbarism. But man's nature is such that it cannot be satisfied with the law of the jungle. Even at its own level the thinking in the article is crooked and self-contradictory. What can hold the United Nations together if the one thing each cares about is loot ? Against the kind of empire here described the whole world must turn. Is the purpose of the article to dissolve the alliance ? General Fuller insists that the men whom he names—and to whom he does less than justice, since there was much more to most of them than the qualities he mentions—were men of wits as well as guts, and he wants us to punch (presumably,

in this case, Hitler) with brains as well as fists. What vestige of brains or wits is to be found in the promulgation of ideas which, if they were accepted, would set the Allies at one another's throats?

THE PROBLEM OF POWER

It is not enough, however, to show that there is more in history than blind force and that that something more is what distinguishes civilization from barbarism. That does not dispose of the problem. Power is an irremovable factor in public affairs. We do not get rid of it by ignoring or denouncing it. One of our members wrote to me not long ago:—

“What is not obscure to me is that your blind spot, a blind spot common to all of us in England to-day, covers the centre of the problem, namely the part played in human affairs by power, which is not simply a devil to be exorcised or a beast to be tamed or a habit to be broken, but a fact as neutral and as fundamental in relation to life as the wind is to a sailing ship.”

General Fuller has posed a question to which Christian thought has at present hardly the beginnings of an answer. The preacher's admonition against the love and pursuit of power is confronted by the inescapable fact that those who deal with public issues are under the necessity of seeking and exercising power. The majority of Christians are hardly aware of the problem because they are not in positions in which its pressure becomes acute. Macaulay in his essay on Warren Hastings recalls the fact that Hastings and the poet Cowper had been school-fellows and friends. In later years, when the former was the object of fierce public attack, the shy and secluded poet could imagine to himself the Governor-General only as the friend of his boyhood and refused to believe that one so good-tempered could have done any great wrong. He had himself lived a sequestered life.

“His spirit had indeed been severely tried, but not by temptations which impelled him to any gross violation of the rules of social morality. He had never been attacked by combinations of powerful and deadly enemies. He had never been compelled to make a choice between innocence and greatness, between crime and ruin.”

Individual Christian thinkers—like Friedrich Neumann and Ernst Troeltsch in Germany half a century ago, and Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr in America to-day—have realized the gravity of the problem and wrestled with it. But it is one which the Christian mind has, broadly speaking, ignored. It will have to be taken up with fresh vigour if the Christian faith is to exercise an influence on the course of events to-day. We shall come back to it in the News-Letter.

THE QUESTION OF TOUGHNESS

A second issue is raised by the article, about which also it is essential that we should clear our minds. It is the question what value we attach to the quality of toughness. Recent discussions have shown how easily we can be misled and divided by the ambiguity of words. No greater national calamity can be conceived than that the British Empire should degenerate into the society of “toughs,” or society run by “toughs,” envisaged by General Fuller. But when I consult the dictionary, I find that tough means also not easily broken or divided, not fragile, capable of great endurance, hardy, stout, sturdy, firm, persistent. These seem to me very desirable human qualities, essential ingredients of a strong character. It is true that they are virtues which belong to the broadly human rather than the specifically Christian sphere. But their presence or absence among us to-day is none the less a matter of special concern to Christians.

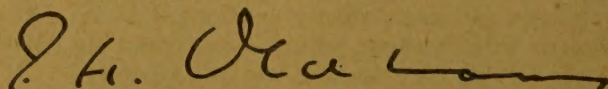
We shall have to live for a long time in the midst of disturbance and unrest. There will be plenty of “toughs” and, with the example of the Nazis before their eyes, they will certainly aspire to power. They will be men who act, or punch; you will have noticed the contemptuous reference in the article to men who talk. The example of Germany shows how easily and quickly the expression of all decent opinion may be crushed by a body of resolute and ruthless men. Toughness has to be met by equal toughness.

If the contest is to be waged on equal terms, it is necessary that the hardier virtues—tenacity, enterprise, resource, precision, alertness, quickness of decision, vigour in action—should be as prevalent and potent among those who are committed to the service of truth, justice, righteousness and good will as among those who regard man as essentially a beast of prey. It is a wrong and mistaken attitude, therefore, to hold aloof from the attempt to include among major educational aims the cultivation of these hardier virtues, because the qualities are capable, as they undoubtedly are, of being perverted to vile ends, or because we suspect the motives of some advocates of the policy. The right course, surely, is to recognize that the virtues in question are a true part of the manhood which God has created, and to throw ourselves without fear into the enterprise, directing our efforts to the consecration of these qualities to the service of Christ and not of the devil.

But in all that we are, of course, still at the sub-Christian level. As a head master who is a warm supporter of physical training, or self-training; wrote to me recently, it must not be allowed, however great its importance, to become an end in itself. It produces not so much a trained as a trainable character. The vital question is that of the end to which the qualities are dedicated.

It is in the region of the spiritual, not of the natural, that the real answer to the philosophy of force has to be given. Here a great transvaluation of values takes place. We have to explore the depths of the saying that the weakness of God is stronger than men. But that does not alter the fact that in the world in which we live the good has to be wrestled and fought for against terrific powers of evil, nor remove the need for Christianity to recover a virility it has largely lost, though it is being given back to-day in some measure to the Churches under persecution. We must get rid of the mentality which supposes that the world can be reformed by resolutions, and repudiate the reduction of Christianity to mere amiability and complacent mediocrity and "the atrocious harmlessness of all things." From that fate those who exult in the precipitousness of life and love the bright fact of danger may recall us by their example. We can love our enemies at least for this—for compelling us to remembrance that Christianity is a call to supernatural heroism.

Yours sincerely,



P.S.—The price of Dr. Paton's *The Church Calling* (Edinburgh House Press, 2 Eaton Gate, S.W. 1) was erroneously given last week as 1s. instead of 1s. 6d.

Subscriptions—12s. 6d. (\$3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year. 6s. 6d. for six months (Great Britain and Ireland only). Back numbers—4d. each. Post free. Reduction for quantities.

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